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ABSTRACT

The best way to help improve reading teacher instruction during the 1980s is through inservice emphasis upon efficient instructional practices and management techniques. However, many inservice programs are ineffective due to lack of coordination. An effective inservice program can be organized by using the following sequence: (1) a steering committee composed of both faculty and administrators is formed; (2) this committee identifies areas of the curriculum in greatest need of inservice development; (3) these areas are ranked in order of priority; (4) a specialist in the chosen inservice curricular area is enlisted; (5) specific needs of the curricular area are pinpointed through surveys and observation of instruction; (6) inservice objectives are developed based on these areas of need; (7) the committee determines the inservice format with considerations for target group, presentation method, and time scheduling; (8) the inservice presentation is given, and should be specific to the needs of the teachers and maximize teacher involvement as a result of the previous organization; and (9) follow-up procedures, including surveys, in-class observations, and newsletters will determine the effectiveness of the inservice presentation, and reveal further teacher needs. (HTH)

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Developing an Effective Inservice Program

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of the International Reading
Association

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The decade of the 80's promises great challenges and frustrations for education. Economic trends, a rapidly changing society, and curricular changes are combining to place even greater demands upon the skills of the classroom teacher. Present economic trends indicate that the educational system will be increasingly hard-pressed to aid classroom teachers in the form of additional materials, support personnel, or facilities in order to meet the increasing demands upon their skills.

However, a positive aspect may emerge from this gloomy forecast. Emphasis upon instructional improvement in reading may change from purchase of "miracle" materials and programs to improvement of teacher instructional practices. Research has consistently demonstrated that teachers, not materials, make the "difference" in pupil reading achievement. Therefore, the best way to help the teachers of the 80's will be through inservice emphasis upon efficient reading instructional practices and management techniques.

However, reading inservice programs have long been generally considered to be quite ineffective in fostering changes in teacher instructional behavior. Possible explanations for ineffective inservice programs (Otto & Erickson, 1977) are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Planning for effective reading inservice programs must take the previously listed causes for ineffective reading inservice programs into consideration. The proposed Inservice Organizational Model attempts to present a planning sequence that offers inservice planners a way to avoid the previously listed pitfalls or at least be cognizant of them.

Insert Table 2 about here

Inservice Organizational Model

1. Steering Committee: The Steering Committee should be composed jointly administrators and faculty. The role of the committee would be to develop and supervise the inservice program. This committee would have two major strengths. First, classroom teachers would be involved in planning, and the committee would provide systematic long-range supervision of the inservice program.
2. General Needs Assessment: One of the first tasks of the committee would be to conduct a general needs assessment to identify areas of the curriculum in greatest need of inservice development. This could be done as a two-step process.
    a. Achievement Analysis: Compare local achievement test performance against national norms or the various areas of the local curriculum to determine relative curricular strengths and weaknesses.
    b. Staff Survey: Develop a brief survey instrument which lists the areas of the curriculum (Reading, Arithmetic, Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, etc.). Have staff members rank order the curricular areas according to their perceived inservice needs.
3. Establish Inservice Priority: The committee would analyze the data from the achievement tests and the Staff Survey to identify common inservice needs. The curricular areas would then be rank ordered by need. The curricular area identified as needing the greatest inservice development would then be selected.

4. Enlist Aid of Consultant: A specialist in the curricular area selected for inservice development should be contacted and invited to become a member of the steering committee. The specialist would be able to clarify and define specific inservice needs. Additionally, the consultant would be able to identify effective methods of inservice presentation.
5. Specific Needs Assessment: A specific needs assessment should be conducted to clarify and pinpoint specific needs in the curricular area of inservice priority. Procedures that may be undertaken at this point include:
    a. A survey of specific needs which asks detailed questions about management, materials, and instructional procedures.
    b. An on-site follow-up visit by the consultant or a committee member to further determine the accuracy of the survey results.
    c. Observation of instruction to further specify faculty needs. For example, assuming that the reading curriculum has been selected for inservice emphasis, observations may include time analyses of management procedures, or instructional analyses of instructional procedures used for sight vocabulary, phonic skills, or comprehension development.
6. Establish Inservice Objectives: The steering committee would analyze the data from the specific needs assessment and select the most frequently identified specific need. Inservice objectives would then be developed to meet this need. For example, if the survey and the observations indicated that time management during reading instruction was a problem area then the committee would develop inservice objectives to meet this need.
7. Develop Inservice Format: After the inservice objectives have been

determined, the committee must then determine the format of the inservice presentation. The committee has to make decisions about target group, presentation method, and time scheduling.

The target group can range in size from the entire faculty, to grade level teams, and individual teachers. The most effective presentation method would be to target the inservice presentation to grade level teams. This combines the efficiency of group presentation with a focus on the needs of a specific group of individuals.

The presentation method may range from a lecture, to simulation, or an in-class demonstration. The least effective method would be the lecture and the most effective would be in-class demonstration. Depending upon the inservice time management capability a simulation or in-class demonstration would be most effective in providing teacher involvement in the inservice process.

Time scheduling can make or break an inservice presentation. Choices for time scheduling include extra hours beyond the normal day or release time during the day. The most effective would be provision of release time during the day. Time scheduling which utilizes release time enables the inservice presentation to focus on grade level teams and use in-class demonstrations. Costs for release time may be kept to a minimum by limiting inservice per grade level to an hour and using the services of support personnel (principal, P.E. instructor, librarian, etc.) to provide activities for the children while teachers are in the inservice session.

8. Inservice Presentation: This is the culminating step of the preceding organizational procedures. As a result of systematic organization, it should be specific to the perceived needs of the teachers and

presented in a format and time which best maximizes teacher involvement.

9. Follow-up: If the inservice was worth the preceding preparatory steps it will be worth evaluating to determine its effectiveness and to identify teachers who need further help. Procedures that should be undertaken include:

   a. An evaluation survey of the faculty to determine their satisfaction with the inservice or to identify continuing needs.

   b. The consultant or committee members conduct in-class observations to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of instructional strategies presented at the inservice. This procedure is very important for three reasons. First, the teachers will realize that instructional behavior was expected to change as a result of the inservice. Second, teachers needing additional help on an individual basis may be identified. Finally, teachers doing a superlative job of implementation may be identified.

   c. Provision needs to be made for those teachers needing additional help in the implementation of the instructional strategies introduced at the inservice. This may be done on an individual basis by having the consultant work with the teacher or by using one of the teachers identified as doing a superlative job as a peer model. By doing this follow-up step, instructional behavior is most apt to be changed.

   d. The effects of the inservice may be given continuity by use of a newsletter which presents new ideas related to the inservice or by providing time in grade level team meetings to share problems or teaching ideas related to the inservice project.

Conclusion

Effective inservice is not the result of "one-shot" presentations. It is the culmination of systematic organization based upon the input of the entire faculty. Only by using an organizational model for inservice will changes in instructional behavior come about.

Reference

Otto, W. & Erickson, L. Inservice Education to Improve Reading Instruction, Newark: International Reading Association, 1977.

TABLE I

Explanations for Ineffective

Inservice Programs

1. Unsystematic organization.
2. Lack of teacher involvement.
3. Failure to focus on specific needs.
4. Lack of individualization between inservice consultant and participants.
5. Reliance on "one-shot" presentations.
6. No systematic follow-up.
7. Lack of consistent budgetary support.
8. Reliance on special program funds that may be peripheral to the perceived needs of the faculty.

Table 2

Inservice Organizational Model